

Joe England

Interviewer: If I could, could I get you just to say your name and your birthday to start off with.

England: Joe H. England 1/7/32.

Interviewer: Okay and did you grow up in Dickson County?

England: White Bluff

Interviewer: White Bluff alright and what were your parents and your family doing when you were growing up during the 30s?

England: Well my daddy was law man in White Bluff about 30 years and they divorced my momma and daddy divorced and I stayed with my dad. And when I got 16 years old I went in the Army>

Interviewer: Okay and what do you recall about growing up during the

England: It was rough (the phone rang and the tape was stopped)

Interviewer: What do you recall about growing up during the 30s kind of the late depression?

England: It was rough around White Bluff real bad. I worked for my uncle for \$3 a day and he'd give me a bad check at the end of the week and I'd have to go back down on Turnville and get him to come to the back to okay it Jim Johnston.

Interviewer: Al right so do you remember going without a lot of things?

England: Oh yeh

Interviewer: And what do you remember about the beginning of WWII and hearing a lot of things about Germany? Did you hear it from like radio and news kind of thing?

England: Oh yeh we heard that yeh.

Interviewer: What about Pearl Harbor what do you remember about do you remember where you were?

England: No I don't.

Interviewer: No

England: December 7th 41 I remember that.

Interviewer: What about during the war do you remember a lot people around here that you knew personally being drafted or going in the Army?

England: Oh yeh

Interviewer: Okay so you said when you were 16 you decided to go into the Army?

England: Yeh

Interviewer: Did you go in because you wanted to

England: Something to eat and

Interviewer: To get away

England: A place to stay that's right.

Interviewer: And where did you go to sign up?

England: At the YMCA Building in Nashville.

Interviewer: Did you go immediately from there did you have to come back home or?

England: Well I signed my own papers when I went in and me and this friend of mine slept in the old train depot overnight. And they told us to that them papers home and get them signed by our parents and I knew they wouldn't sign them so I signed my own and went in.

Interviewer: That was in 48?

England: 48

Interviewer: And where did you go for your basic training?

England: Fort Jackson and Fort Bragg

Interviewer: Fort Jackson was that just your 12 week or?

England: That was 13 weeks of infantry training.

Interviewer: What do you remember was that extremely difficult or was it

England: No there wasn't much to that but we took tank training down at Fort Bragg.

Interviewer: So did they kick you especially for that or did you say you wanted to do that special training?

England: They picked it for me.

Interviewer: Did you like the tank training the armored division like that?

England: Yeh it wasn't bad.

Interviewer: What did ya'll do special at that point in that training were you learning to drive or were like an assistant kind of thing?

England: That's what I was a driver and we didn't have radios in our tanks when we first got down there and we had to pour sidewalks to get to where we stayed in the barracks and everything. And the tank commanders would have to hit you on the shoulder if he wanted you to go left he would hit you on the left shoulder hit you on the right shoulder to go right.

Interviewer: When you got there at the beginning was there a lot of book work or anything or they immediately just kind of put you in the train?

England: We just trained constantly we just we'd go out everyday just about.

Interviewer: And just drive and drive until they felt like you had mastered it?

England: Right

Interviewer: When did you find out that you would be going to Korea?

England: Well we had a Colonel in Fort Bragg and he got us all out there the whole battalion got us out one day and he told us that the North Koreans had come into South Korea and they was going to send the youngest men our of the battalion to Korea. And I was one of the youngest.

Interviewer: So what year did you actually go?

England: To Korea?

Interviewer: Yes sir

England: I got over there July 25, 1950.

Interviewer: So you were pretty much from the beginning

England: To the end.

Interviewer: There's a lot of stories about the equipment that the United States was using kind of like the leftovers from

England: WWI

Interviewer: So did you experience a lot of that kind of

England: We had the old Sherman tanks the M4s and they wasn't nothing like they are today

Interviewer: Right

England: They had the ole laterals that you had to steer it by

Interviewer: So did you feel how did you feel with your training. Did you feel prepared on your way over did you feel like you were ready?

England: Oh yeh

Interviewer: You felt like everyone prepared you?

England: Oh we was trained good yeh.

Interviewer: Did you feel like your equipment was good enough?

England: the first tank I saw knocked out in Korea was a 234 Russian tank it was about twice the size of ours and this Colonel on the ship told us we didn't have nothing to worry about and when I saw it I said yeh we've got some problems.

Interviewer: Where did you land in Korea?

England: Pusan the first time the second time I landed at Incheon.

Interviewer: Well the first time where what were you like your orders were you just going to go and

England: See they organized the 89th tank battalion that's what I was in aboard this Japanese ship that we went over on. And this guy come out there on the ship and told us anybody with MOS numbers so and so fall out well I had four or five MOS numbers so they already had the tanks there at Pusan and we had to drive them up to about 30 miles to Mason. And we bulldozed the top of this mountain off and made a perimeter we set a perimeter up there.

Interviewer: So were your average duties when you woke up in the morning your average day

England: Stay safe

Interviewer: I mean were you just guarding the top or were you constantly going out looking and

England: Well like if an infantry outfit got pinned down we would send out two or three infantry tanks to take care of it get them out of it that's what we done for a long time.

Interviewer: So it was kind of you were kind of like on an on call basis

England: Right

Interviewer: Pretty much the whole time?

England: Right

Interviewer: And what did the like the food were you always fed well?

England: Yeh we had good food.

Interviewer: Did you ever work with a lot of the Korean people that were around or did ya'll see many?

England: We kept a few in our outfit we didn't keep many.

Interviewer: It was mostly just kind of like a translation kind of thing?

England: Right

Interviewer: I know you said the first time how did this cause you went over there twice what did you

England: I got wounded and went back to the hospital in Tokyo General Hospital

Interviewer: Okay so you got did you get your Purple Heart then?

England: Yeh I got a Purple Heart on the DD214.

Interviewer: And what happened to get injured what were you doing?

England: Fired a 50 caliber machine gun and it blowed up.

Interviewer: The machine gun actually did?

England: Right

Interviewer: After you came back from the hospital were you doing the same duty in the same battalion?

England: Well when I left to go the hospital I was in one company and when I went back they assigned me to another company. A lot of my outfit that I was with before was this other company so they put me back in that company.

Interviewer: And you were at where then?

England: At Inchon

Interviewer: And what kind of duties did you have here?

England: At Inchon?

Interviewer: Yes sir

England: I just had to go back to my old outfit.

Interviewer: It was the same thing as kind of

England: Yeh

Interviewer: And what do you remember from battle experiences? Did you feel like you were fighting an extremely well trained efficient kind of fighting force? Did you feel it was very just

England: They didn't have as much equipment and stuff as we had but like if when you kill some of them Chinese in November that's when they come in there a lot of them would just pick up there weapons and just start firing back you know that's

Interviewer: Very kind of spermatic maybe

England: Yeh they'd get to blowing horns and bugles at night the would curl your hair buddy.

Interviewer: Was it just to kind of

England: Harassment

Interviewer: Against you just trying to make you feel like did you feel were they kind of always always around or were you did they come seeking you or did you have to

England: They seeked up

Interviewer: So you pretty much you were just kind of stationary you were just kind of fighting off most of the time. Well how did you feel about a lot of your leadership and people that were over you? Did you feel like they were prepared and knew what was going on?

England: We used to set back there in that camp and talk about that. When they the night I got caught we was down in this valley we had five tanks up in there five tanks in a company and we should have been up high firing down instead of in that valley I think. I think they was wrong.

Interviewer: Were you firing up?

England: Hell no we was firing directly level.

Interviewer: Okay you said you got caught what happened to

England: They blowed my tank up they hit it three times before I got out.

Interviewer: And you got captured?

England: Right

Interviewer: Where did they take you for POW?

England: Well the first place we went was a place they called mining camp Death Valleys what they call it that's what they call it now. But they carried us in this mining camp. They had a tungsten mine in there where they used to get tungsten out. That's where we was at.

Interviewer: What on an average day at the POW camp what would happen?

England: Try to survive.

Interviewer: It was just constant survival?

England: All we eat was damn minute and cracked corn.

Interviewer: Well how many of you were there?

England: In this particular camp I'd say probably 75 to 100.

Interviewer: Were you constantly harassed by them or

England: Oh yeh

Interviewer: They were all from just dawn to dusk or did they actually let you sleep?

England: Well we slept yeh but they would all ways make us fall out like they did in revelry in the Army. And they would commence to cuss us I know they called us Monica peas and would stick their finger in your face and you know you just hit you with a riffle butt kick the shit out of you.

Interviewer: And could you do

England: Couldn't do nothing about it.

Interviewer: And if you did

England: They'd kill you

Interviewer: Just right on the spot? How long were you in this

England: 33 months

Interviewer: And everyday was like that?

England: Not every day but most of the time. See was going on detail one time down in this village and there was some onions growing beside this ole Koreans house hut and I these guards were all around us with them Jap 25 riffles I run over there and grabbed me two of them onions and eat the son of a bitches and he got to shooting over my head. So that night when I got back down to the hut he come in there with an interpreter and I had to go and with and stay on half a cam of millet a day for 14 days and nights.

Interviewer: Well what finally happened that you were like released?

England: The Pay man John they signed a truce and I got out in August the 25, 1953.

Interviewer: And I guess you flew straight home or did you have to go to some kind of debriefing kind of thing?

England: Well we had to do that and then they put us on a ship at Inchon and we came back into San Francisco Bay. See right after we got caught we was in these huts over there and there was a lot of North Korean and Chinese outside of this hut and these P51 Mustangs came over and strafed huts we was in and killed two men in my hut. And I didn't get a scratch but they strafed us twice they strafed and rolled over and strafed us again.

Interviewer: Sometime the Korean War is kind of there is a lot people that think differently about it

England: Oh yeh

Interviewer: And how did you feel going into the service into this? A lot of the people some that were of the draftee people some were proud that they were serving their country and some felt it was unnecessary.

England: I never did think of it in that way. I know they took care of me while I was in there and I never did think of that.

Interviewer: You always felt it was your duty

England: That's right

Interviewer: And you were proud

England: That's right

Interviewer: Okay and how did you feel about the overall leadership presidential and your generals and stuff did you feel like they were always on top of things?

England: Well I don't know that much about politics I don't know nothing about that really.

Interviewer: Well a lot of the soldiers weren't well the ones I talked to said they were never really worried about the political side of the United States some felt MacArthur and some of the others were being too political with their the way they were dealing with the war.

England: Well we was told a lot of stuff I don't know but the night the evening real late we knew that we was fixing to get out that it was over. These four jet planes them F86s they come right down over the Yeager River and right over our camp and wiggled their wings. I told them I said we're out of this damn place.

Interviewer: I guess that made you extremely happy.

England: Oh man what are you talking about. Then the Red Cross came in there that night and gave us some cigarettes and toothpaste and soap.

Interviewer: I guess did you did they allow you to bath and stuff in this

England: In the summertime we could we'd take a bath in the Yeager River down there. They had machine guns set up and walking guards and everything you couldn't get away.

Interviewer: Was it the camp like a big fenced in place or was it just so heavily guarded that

England: It's heavily guarded there's not way to escape. And you was so damn weak you couldn't do nothing.

Interviewer: Cause of the lack of food and

England: Oh man yeh

Interviewer: Did you try to did anyone try to exercise and keep their body or did you just

England: Yeh some of us did yeh

Interviewer: So how many people from your battalion went into this camp with you?

England: There were several I don't really know the night I got caught there was only my assistant driver and myself. They killed three of them in a tank. I saw my tank commander when he got shot in the back and then they did it the third time and it cut a gunnery in two Buckelwich cut him in two.

Interviewer: Over all how do you I know it's hard but how do you overall describe your Korean War experience like do you feel like it well it was difficult but was it a good time did you feel at that the time you was in it that it was a successful thing that you were doing?

England: Well you can't think nothing like that hell we was sitting back there eating damn millet and sorghum seed and cracked corn you can't feel happy about that. It ain't nothing you can do about it.

Interviewer: Did you feel like they were working to try to get you

England: Oh yeh

Interviewer: But you never was hopelessness ever a part of your attitude in a situation like

England: Well that's the main thing right there is knowing you don't know when your going to get out or what's going to happen if they are going to kill you the next day or what see that's always on your mind.

Interviewer: Did you always try to think I need to survive this is

England: Oh yeh

Interviewer: Okay do you have any

England: I've seen a lot of them guys over there with there feet froze and their bone would be sticking out the end of their toes.

Interviewer: Those POW camps had to have been

England: Their son of a bitches I'm telling you.

Interviewer: That's terrible

England: Their no good buddy I'm telling you. You don't never want that I'd rather die next time I they'd have to shoot me.

Interviewer: Well do you have anything else you want to add?

England: I've got a POW magazine up here you might want.

Interviewer: Really